

Homily
November 3, 2024
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time
31:28 – 38:09

In the mid-1970's, I taught Junior High. We call it Middle School now. And among the students I taught was one particular little girl named Kelly. Invariably, Kelly would raise her hand and say, "I have two questions." It was never one. It was always two. She was very inquisitive. She was an excellent student, but always two. Then one day, guess what! "I have three questions." (laughter) And the whole room groaned.

Now, I found her delightful because she was so inquisitive. She really wanted to learn and she just kept driving that way.

I seldom was absent or sick. I got over that the first year when I was never so sick in my life, Teachers are nothing but "germ-catchers."

I always felt badly if I had to be away and there was a substitute. I knew those intra-pubescent monsters in those chairs very well. I knew that what they were going to do and how they were going to ask questions.

But think about a substitute teacher. They don't know them. And you know how students can be with substitutes, right? Asking trick questions. Asking questions to take the teacher away from what they're supposed to be covering. Or worse, asking the question to show, "We students are in charge here. You're just a substitute. This is our room."

Anybody here substitute teach? (Raising his hand) Yeah? Ain't it grand?

Now, the reason I bring this up, Kelly as well as substitutes, is because we have in the Gospel, questions. One question by a Scribe. But what we didn't hear were the three instances beforehand, of the Sadducees and Pharisees questioning Jesus as a teacher. They question him about his authority. They question him about taxes and Caesar. And then they question him about life, death and resurrection.

They wanted to trick him, to pin him down. To make him say something that they could just say, "Well, you're wrong. You're just a substitute. Because our teacher is Moses." Which they also say in one of those passages.

Jesus handles it very well.

And then comes this Scribe, who has a genuine question. "What's the first Commandment of all the Commandments?" Now there are 613 Precepts in the Mosaic Law. Plus there is the Oral Tradition that's passed down. But the Scribe wants one as kind of a guide, that sums it all up.

Jesus has an immediate response. He quotes the *Shemah*. It's a daily prayer. It's prayed three times – then as even now – by pious Jews. It's kind of like our Angelus: 6 a.m., Noon and 6 p.m., when we hear the bells and some of us stop and pray the Angelus.

The *Shemah*. “*Hear, O Israel. The Lord our God is Lord alone...*” as we heard twice – in the First Reading and in the Gospel.

But then Jesus does something unique. He adds a second, intimately tied to the first. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” That's from Leviticus.

So now, he's knitted these two together and given them an intimate connection that cannot be broken – because they're tied by **love**. And you've heard us talk about love. That it is a decision. It is a commitment. And in God's case, as well as the Lord Jesus' case, it is “all in.” It is **Hesed**. It's reliable.

And the Scribe is delighted. Now, the Scribe was a lawyer. [I'm not saying bad things about lawyers. (laughter) Lord knows, I don't want to get sued.] But he was a scholar of the Law. He asked the question – but why didn't he know it? Because he knew the Law, but could he get underneath it? And really know it?

So he asked a teacher, this Rabbi known as Jesus. And he's delighted by the response. Then he reveals that he even understands it and has made it his own, immediately.

And Jesus says, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.”

Here's the wonderful last line, “And no one dared to ask Jesus anymore questions.”

When we ask questions, my brothers and sisters, we are on the path to learning and understanding. Possibly to the point of wisdom. Right? [I'll take it (the water bottle) now because I'm about to finish and I may need it up there (the sanctuary).]

So. We're going to leave with a question today. You have heard of the two Great Commandments, rooted in that decisive faithful love.

What is your, or my, response to the connection and how is it revealed in our actions – to God, to our neighbor, or to ourselves? How is it revealed in what we actually say “yes” to?